

INAUGURAL ADDRESS
OF
HON. ROBERT S. RANTOUL,
MAYOR
OF THE
CITY OF SALEM,
TO THE
. . City Council, . .
JANUARY, 1890.



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18903

SALEM:
OBSERVER BOOK AND JOB PRINT,
1890



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CITY OF SALEM, }
January 6, 1890. }

Resolved:

That the thanks of the City Council be tendered to the Mayor, for his able and instructive address, and that a copy of it be requested for publication with the municipal documents.

IN COMMON COUNCIL, Jan. 6, 1890.

Adopted and sent up for concurrence.

Wm. F. M. COLLINS, *Clerk.*

IN BOARD OF ALDERMEN, }
January 6, 1890. }

Adopted in concurrence.

HENRY M. MEEK, *City Clerk.*

MAYOR'S ADDRESS.

Gentlemen of the City Council:

The suffrages of our fellow citizens have called us to administer the city government for the coming year, and I conform cheerfully to the practice which has grown up under section seven of the City Charter, in offering you some introductory words, although I cannot help thinking that, if a new executive officer were called upon to address his associates at the close rather than at the beginning of his first official term, his experience would furnish him with something more valuable to say. I shall do little more than to indicate, in a general way, the direction in which whatever influence I may have with the incoming City Government will be thrown, and to discuss, not too much in detail, a few of the matters of obvious interest and importance which are before us, leaving the rest to await our better acquaintance with the subjects and with one another.

The first concern of municipal administration is money. In saying this I by no means ignore the very important relations we hold to questions of public instruction, charity, license, police, and the like, but in these matters we act, in a large degree, under the guidance of state law, whereas in matters of taxation and finance,—in the raising and spending of money,—our functions are, within certain limits, arbitrary and absolute in their nature. Taxation is no doubt the most unpleasing process by which the citizen is called upon to part with any portion of his substance. Yet it will be generally conceded that no portions of our means are more productively invested than are those employed in well-considered and well-ordered municipal expenses.

I have before me tax-tables, which I shall not trouble you with reading, calculated to exhibit the relative standing of Salem, from year to year, as compared with the other cities of the Commonwealth, and as compared with her own recent past. There are causes working here which tend to make taxation a little more burdensome than elsewhere. Probably a larger percentage of Salem capital is placed in enterprises outside of Salem, than is the usual proportion in American cities. Probably a somewhat larger portion of our people

than is common in other cities, live upon fixed incomes which it is out of their power to increase, and to them an increase in taxes means a lessening of comfort. And the fact that so many of our young men of enterprise and spirit are directly dependent, in their business prosperity, not on the growth and advancement of Salem, but of another and a greater city,—all these things have a tendency, notwithstanding the exceptional intelligence and public spirit of our citizens, to make them a little more restive under the burdens of municipal taxation. Yet the tables show no occasion for discouragement or alarm, but on the contrary give every assurance that our financial condition is sound and healthy, and that if we are content to go carefully and with reasonable moderation and economy, the year may be made one of usefulness and credit to the city.

I have tabulated for your consideration the annual tax-rate of the twenty-three cities of this Commonwealth for the five years including 1884, '85, '86, '87 and '88. Upon examination of this table you will find that the average annual tax-rate of Salem for these years was \$16.30 per thousand dollars, whilst the average annual tax-rate of all the other sister cities together was \$16.25. The cities which enjoyed an average annual tax-rate less

than ours for these five years were ten in number, and were Boston, Brockton, Cambridge, Lowell, Malden, Newton, Northampton, Somerville, Springfield and Waltham. The cities whose tax-rates averaged higher than ours for those five years were twelve in number, and were Chelsea, Fall River, Fitchburg, Gloucester, Haverhill, Holyoke, Lawrence, Lynn, New Bedford, Newburyport, Taunton and Worcester. Of the thirty-five cities and towns of Essex county, in 1888, five others besides Salem paid a tax of \$16 per

23 CITIES OF THE COMMONWEALTH.

	'88	'87	'86	'85	'84
Boston.....	\$13.40	\$13.40	\$12.70	\$12.80	\$17.00
Brockton.....	15.90	16.67	16.00	13.80	17.00
Cambridge.....	15.00	16.00	15.00	15.50	16.80
Chelsea.....	18.40	17.60	17.80	18.20	18.60
Fall River.....	17.40	18.40	18.80	18.80	18.80
Fitchburg.....	16.80	17.80	17.40	18.20	16.80
Gloucester.....	17.50	18.50	19.00	17.50	18.00
Haverhill.....	16.60	16.50	16.76	20.50	17.96
Holyoke.....	17.20	17.00	18.20	17.20	14.80
Lawrence.....	16.00	17.80	16.40	16.60	16.80
Lowell.....	15.70	15.70	16.00	16.00	17.50
Lynn.....	18.60	18.80	19.00	17.80	18.40
Malden.....	14.60	14.50	13.60	13.80	14.00
New Bedford.....	17.00	17.40	16.00	16.30	16.60
Newburyport.....	16.60	16.60	17.30	18.00	18.20
Newton.....	15.20	15.80	14.40	14.00	14.40
Northampton.....	14.00	14.00	15.00	12.50	14.00
Salem.....	16.00	16.00	15.50	16.50	17.50
Somerville.....	14.00	14.80	15.40	16.60	16.60
Springfield.....	13.60	13.80	12.80	12.80	14.00
Taunton.....	16.60	16.10	16.70	17.30	16.50
Waltham.....	13.80	14.40	13.50	15.10	15.80
Worcester.....	16.00	17.00	18.00	18.00	16.60

thousand, namely: Groveland, Lawrence, Newburyport, Peabody and Rockport. Of the remaining twenty-nine, twenty paid a less rate and nine paid more. Saugus paid \$19; Amesbury, \$18.10; Essex, Lynn and Merrimac, \$18; Gloucester, \$17.50; Bradford and Marblehead, \$17, and Haverhill, \$16.60. Of the twenty which paid less, Georgetown paid \$15.50; Methuen and West Newbury, \$15; Danvers, \$14.80; Beverly, \$14; Ipswich and Rowley, \$13; North Andover, \$12.60; Andover and Salisbury, \$11; Middleton and Wenham, \$10.40; Newbury and Topsfield, \$10; Boxford and Lynnfield, between \$9 and \$10; Hamilton and Topsfield, between \$8 and \$9; Nahant, \$6; Manchester, \$4.15.

I am unable to compare the tax-rate of Salem for 1889 with that of other places in the county and Commonwealth, but, in connection with the advance which it shows this year of \$1.50 per thousand, it should be stated that the expense upon the City Library represents a taxation of nearly one dollar per thousand, while against this is to be offset the exceptionally large amount of \$16,593 in unpaid bills passed over to us from the last municipal year, less the exceptionally small amount of \$5,134 in cash on hand to meet them, showing in this item, instead of the usual substantial bal-

ance, a deficit of \$11,459, which we must at once provide for.

Again the figures show that for the fifteen years now past, from 1875 to 1889 inclusive, embracing the official terms of their honors, Mayors Williams, Oliver, Calley, Hill, Huntington and Raymond, the average annual tax-rate of Salem* has been \$15.57 per thousand dollars of taxable valuation—less by 73 cents than the average of the five years before the last, and less by \$1.93 than the tax-rate of the year just closed. During these fifteen years, our lowest annual tax rate was \$13, in 1881, and our highest has been \$17.50 in the years 1884 and 1889. It should be known in this connection that, throughout the whole period, a portion of our water rates has been charged and paid in the form

*ANNUAL RATE PER \$1,000.

1875.....	\$16 00
1876.....	15 00
1877.....	16 00
1878.....	15 00
1879.....	13 00
1880.....	14 50
1881.....	13 00
1882.....	15 50
1883.....	16 00
1884.....	17 50
1885.....	16 50
1886.....	15 50
1887.....	16 00
1888.....	16 00
1889.....	17 50

of taxation, and that if our water-works had been made to bear the cost of their construction and support, our taxes would have been appreciably lower.

If it were necessary to make up a reliable estimate of the exact financial standing of Salem as amongst the cities of Massachusetts, or of her relative standing today as compared with other periods of her own history, further figures would be called for, but this is no part of my purpose. Suffice it to say that the census presents no aspect which is not encouraging. The population of Salem never was greater. In 1790, numbering 7921, it is now about 30,000. Throughout the century, broken by the official returns into periods of five years each, the fixed population of Salem has advanced with a robust and healthy growth, unchecked at any time, save in the single period between 1860 and 1865, when the grip of civil war was wringing the life-blood, drop by drop, out of the heart of the nation. Within fifteen years, with slight and infrequent fluctuations, the aggregate of taxable polls in Salem was advanced, with a steady pace, from 6105 in 1875 to 8331 in 1889, and the same may be said of the number of assessed dwellings, which, in the same period of

fifteen years, has advanced from 3700 in 1875 to 4210 in 1889.*

The additions to the number of assessed dwellings in Salem, both by new buildings and by enlargements, are as follows for the last five years:

Years,.....	1885	1886	1887	1888	1889
New Dwellings.....	71	65	61	64	73
Additions.....	34	28	67	65	54

Notwithstanding the prostration of several leading industries the increase in our manufacturing output seems never to have been greater. Indeed the rare attractions of our tide-water facilities and cheap wharfage and storage; of our easy communication and cheap transportation for both freight and persons; of our fine old mansion houses and convenient modern tenements, to be

*TAXABLE POLLS, DWELLINGS AND ASSESSED TAXES.

Years.	No. Polls assessed.	No. Dwellings assessed.	Total Tax assessed.
1875.....	6105	3700	\$433,206
1876.....	6292	3796	403,252
1877.....	6264	3816	407,829
1878.....	6432	3855	375,440
1879.....	6521	3918	322,633
1880.....	6853	3989	357,739
1881.....	7078	4000	323,136
1882.....	7076	4047	409,576
1883.....	7198	4078	427,643
1884.....	7341	4036	458,079
1885.....	7365	4071	428,056
1886.....	7856	3897	417,437
1887.....	8109	3963	435,215
1888.....	8276	4075	438,174
1889.....	8331	4210	472,638

had at moderate rentals; and the many eligible sites for manufacturing enterprises in close proximity to our busy trade centre, seem at last to be appreciated. The best figures at hand seem to show that about \$175,000 have been added to our valuation this year in real estate improvements for manufacturing and business purposes, including an addition to the equipment of the Cotton Mills, the costly buildings of the Electric Lighting company, of the Power Brothers and of several other parties, and we have now the immediate promise of an investment of \$50,000 more by the Salem Building Association.

It would be unsafe to venture upon comparisons based on assessed valuations for fifteen years*

*Years.	Real Ass'd.	Pers'l Ass'd.	Total Val.
1875.....	\$14,323,600	\$11,988,672	\$26,312,272
1876.....	14,393,100	11,651,432	26,044,532
1877.....	13,263,200	11,443,093	24,706,293
1878.....	13,292,800	10,878,903	24,171,703
1879.....	12,316,200	10,616,477	22,932,677
1880.....	12,397,000	11,329,406	23,726,406
1881.....	12,478,200	11,289,479	23,767,679
1882.....	12,562,500	12,940,742	25,511,242
1883.....	12,632,100	12,741,815	25,373,915
1884.....	12,809,200	12,527,772	25,336,972
1885.....	12,831,300	12,218,730	25,050,030
1886.....	13,283,500	12,634,124	25,917,624
1887.....	13,512,900	12,674,427	26,187,327
1888.....	13,773,600	12,577,728	26,351,328
1889.....	13,998,600	12,056,951	26,055,551

This table is made up from returns at the State house of the assessed valuation of May 1st. The totals are increased each year by additional valuations, recorded after May 1st, but are sufficiently exact for the purpose of comparison.

without knowing something of the varying systems pursued by different boards of assessors, and without making accurate computations of the inflations and shrinkages in values during the period. I have no reason to suppose the present assessed valuation of Salem to be other than a fair one. It is not substantially reduced by the depressions affecting several of the great industries of the city, but it can hardly be expected to advance. It is higher by nearly one million of dollars than the average valuation of Salem for the last fifteen years. I accept it therefore as the honest work of a competent board, constituted as this one is for the express purpose of securing a fixed policy of action, and a tenure of office extended enough to insure experience and skill, and I conclude that our assessed valuation is as high as it should be. Thus all lines of reasoning lead back to the one single result, namely, that if we desire lower taxes we have only to spend less money. In this connection it is proper to call attention to the fact that the bulk of our municipal indebtedness matures within the next three years, and that, while the saving of interest will begin to make itself felt next year, it will, in three years, if no further bonds are issued in the meanwhile, except those called for by the new water main,

equal the interest accruing on that loan and about one dollar per thousand of our taxable valuation in addition.

For a statement in detail of the present indebtedness of the city, of the state of the water loan, municipal loan, sinking funds and various trusts, I respectfully refer you to the treasurer's report, the exhaustive nature of which leaves nothing further to be said.

The condition of our streets as allied to questions of economy and finance becomes a matter of the first importance. The estimate of the Department of Streets, Bridges, and Sewers, last year, consisted of three principal items:—

For the general purposes of the Department,	\$48,000
For block paving,	7,600
For sewers,	4,000
Making a total of	\$59,600

As against a total, for the same items, in 1888, of \$59,700, and in 1887 of \$53,800, and about \$52,000 in 1886.

But the estimates do not represent the actual sums expended, since there is a slight excess in several of the items and an excess of \$4000 on account of block paving. To the estimates must be added the following items not covered by the annual appropriations:—

Excess in block paving,	\$4,000
Excess in cost of sewers,	1,800
Excess in repairs and extensions,	4,356
Total,	\$10,156

Making a total of ten thousand dollars in excess of the expenditure thought desirable at the beginning of the year 1889.

Nothing is more indispensable to the growth and prosperity of the city than good streets. We can afford to have them because our population is compact, and hence our streets are short, and because this region affords the best material for road-building in the world. Whether we regard the pleasure of living near good streets, or of riding over them,—whether we regard the Salem of the future as likely to be a trade centre or a residential suburb, the value of smooth, noiseless highways free from mud and dust is equally to be insisted on. New streets should not be projected so far in advance of population and improvement that much time must elapse between the expenditure and the taxation necessary to reimburse it, nor should the projecting of new streets or the improving of old ones lag so far behind the demands of a healthy growth as to discourage enterprise, and check investment.

But in the expenditures upon our city streets I

believe there is need of greater scrutiny and caution. I believe that if less were done each year, and that done more thoroughly, the present generation would lose nothing, and the Salem of the twentieth century would be the gainer. I believe that if more of the cost of the road-bed were buried under ground where it is out of sight, in the form of drainage and foundation, less constant attention and expense would be called for on the surface, where the outlay makes more show but bears less fruitage. No gravel road can be kept in order which is exposed to the ravages of standing or running water. No amount of attention to the surface will dispense with the inexorable necessity of a thorough sub-structure. Of all the wasteful economies practiced in American communities, cheap, unskilful road building is perhaps the most short-sighted. We have now a good steam roller and a good stone-crusher, the indispensable requisites of good road building on the systems of Telfourd and McAdam. Only in strictly business sections, or on exceptionally bad grades where the wash imperils the road bed, are the noise and extra cost of Belgian pavement to be overbalanced by its greater durability and firmness, and for the remaining sections of the city good gravel roads, well drained

underneath and well smoothed and rolled on the top, ought before many years, and at a moderate cost, to make of our charming avenues more than ever the favored resort of the buyers and sellers of southern Essex county,—of the summer pleasure-seekers and sight-seers of the country, as well as the favored residence of discriminating people, who look for the solid comforts of a permanent home.

In this connection let me ask your attention to the expediency of systematic street watering, which, I think, can be done to better advantage under the control of our street department, than at private charge, and let me also commend the awakened interest in the renewal of our shade trees—an element in the taxable valuation of a place not sufficiently recognized—which gives promise of appreciable results in the near future. The money spent in these ways is an inconsiderable item in our yearly budget, but it may be doubted if any item of city expenditure is more wisely and productively directed. With strict good faith in the matter of removing buildings, and of manipulating electric wires, and with the exercise of a little patience and kindness towards growing trees, we may look forward to a day—not too remote—when Salem will enjoy the substantial

advantage to be known among the cities, famous for their well-made, well-kept and well-shaded avenues, as she has already enjoyed, for ten years past, the distinction of being amongst the best lighted cities of the world.

Various changes are to be recommended with a view to correcting some minor evils, growing out of a loose system of appropriation. More thorough methods of auditing and accounting, such as any well-conducted business, of such magnitude, would call for, could not fail to conduce to accuracy and economy. So far as may be, it is desirable to bring to the notice of the several boards and committees, in the early months of the year, every call for money likely to be made during the coming twelve-month,—not merely for ordinary current expenses, but for larger specific changes and improvements;—so far as this may be done before the Committee on Accounts makes up its monthly report in June, upon which is based the tax-levy of July, so much more accurate will be our approximation to the sums required and so much more wisely and equitably will our expenditures be adjusted. Proposals for large expenditures will come before us which are not new, some of them more and some less urgent in their nature. Many of these can be presented

early as well as late, and ought to be presented early enough to enjoy a fair degree of scrutiny before the March appropriations. To insist upon some such requirements as these, will, I am sure, work no detriment to the common welfare.

In the next place, there is little doubt that the system of passing gross items, in loose terms and in round numbers in an appropriation bill, and treating that as sufficient authority for the expenditure of money, is a mischievous one, and one in which we lag behind our neighbors. The insertion of gross sums in an appropriation bill is for the purpose of fixing the proportionate amounts the different departments shall expend, but it should not authorize any one officer or committee to expend any part of the amount appropriated, and I respectfully submit that it is unbusiness-like and unwise to allow any officer, department or committee to draw and expend any sums except specified sums voted for a specified purpose to a specified factor or agent.

It would be easy to cite instances since the passage of the amended finance ordinance, approved Dec. 9th, 1885, in which scant regard has been paid to its salutary provisions.

The various reports of departments are before you and will soon be in print. I need not

commend them to your careful examination. A few suggestions occur to me, in reading them, which I venture to offer.

From the report of the City Solicitor, and from an examination of former reports, it will be perceived that quite one-half of the causes in the defence of which that officer appears in court in behalf of the city, are cases of claims for damages on account of alleged personal injuries, growing out of defects in the condition of the streets. Doubtless an equally large number of similar claims are settled before reaching his hands. The number of these claims is much in excess of what it should be, and the settlements effected and terms accepted seem to show that actions are not brought in the expectation of recovering substantial amounts, but rather with the idea of taking a chance. This is a demoralizing practice and ought to be discouraged. The abuse is nothing new and the remedy for it seems to be to establish a more thorough system of prompt reporting amongst the Police force, when they discover defects, and of prompt attention to these reported defects on the part of the Street Department. Snow and ice occasion a large part of them, and if it be possible, at least during the inclement season, to detail some capable and efficient officer of the force, who shall

hold himself ready to receive from the patrolmen reports of defects, and to see to it that they are promptly corrected by abutters or promptly brought to the attention of the Street Department, and whose further duty it shall be to repair, on call, to the scene of every accident, as soon as announced, and then and there collect such evidence as can be discovered, there can be no doubt that the cost of such service would be more than saved to the city.

The Solicitor's report recalls to mind the fact that the disputed boundary between Salem and Marblehead remains unadjusted, and, as the property which formed the subject-matter of the contention is now impaired in value and unimproved, this might be a favorable moment, after ten years of litigation, for attempting a settlement.

The report on the condition of our water supply is satisfactory and assures us that our relations with our neighbors on every side are amicable in this regard, as they should be. You will be called on soon to negotiate a new loan of a quarter of a million of dollars, and to provide for the interest thereon. For some years past our water debt has been decreasing, but the process is checked by this new expenditure, and we are confronted with the question whether it will be wiser to add the

interest of this loan to the tax assessment or to raise it by increased water rates, assessed as at present on fixtures and consumers. The whole matter will be in your hands for judicious adjustment.

Fortunately the idea has at last taken root in southern Essex county that the supply of water from Wenham lake is not unlimited, and that good policy and fair dealing forbid that further drafts shall be made upon it. The adjustment now complete furnishes Beverly with a supply of her own, which will be limited rather than increased by the fact that her pumping is at her own cost, whilst Marblehead, Danvers, Peabody, Lynn and Swampscott are all supplied from independent sources, and this will be found to be the correct solution of the problem, at once satisfactory to our neighbors and reassuring to ourselves.

Of other leading departments of the city government, the School Department, the Police Department, the Fire Department, the Poor Department, I purposely say nothing, because without a better acquaintance with their condition and needs than I now possess, what I might say would be less likely to prove edifying to you, than embarrassing to me. The yearly records of all of them are before you. They are elaborate and

suggestive and deserve, as they will receive, our earliest thought. It is proper for me to say, however, that I have no disposition to disturb the present adjustment of the license question. Whilst the system of territorial limitation does not prevent drunkenness, it brings it under better control, withdraws it from a large part of the city, and exempts women and children from exposure to its disgusting displays, and I am far from sure that any means now at our command can be made to produce better results.

The City Library is at last an accomplished fact. For more than twenty years plans have been discussed for opening to the general public, on easy terms, a better supply of reading matter. I should do myself an injustice if I did not say that I have favored a plan essentially different from that which has prevailed. That it had attractive features and influential support goes for nothing now. Other counsels have prevailed. A city library, quite independent of all other collections of books previously existing, is now established in a section of the city poorly accommodated with reading facilities before, and the experiment, soon to enter upon its second year, has already achieved an unmistakable success which, it is not too much to say, has favorably disappointed both skeptics

and enthusiasts alike. Hallowed by the last, best energies of the Brothers Emmerton, than whom Salem has borne no sons more studiously devoted to her highest needs,— hallowed as well by the generous endowment of the family of John Bertram, a name to be remembered in Salem so long as wise munificence shall be recalled with praise, and now further endowed by the thoughtful liberality of an ex-mayor of Salem, an enterprise such as this, so auspiciously begun, so doubly consecrated, can never fail of success.

I respectfully submit for your consideration whether the present is not an opportune moment for discontinuing the employment of dangerous explosives as a means of popular amusement on Salem Common. The last year has brought home to us in a solemn manner, if indeed we needed the lesson for the second time, that neither the place nor the character of such entertainments is well chosen. I am sure that the natural jubilation called forth by our great festival in each recurring year can be provided for,—in case games, races, regattas, music and other diversions, with bonfires and illuminations on the hill-tops and along the headlands shall prove inadequate to the popular demand,—by pyrotechnic displays at some point where the risk from fire and from injury to the

person will be considerably less than in so central and limited a space as Washington Square.

GENTLEMEN OF THE CITY COUNCIL:—The year 1890—an unwritten page in the history of Salem—lies open before us. When it is closed, we shall have traced upon it something that will endure for good or ill, to this ancient community. May we not ask that the prayers of all good citizens be united with our own, for an administration of affairs alike profitable to the people and honorable to ourselves?

Phillips Library



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